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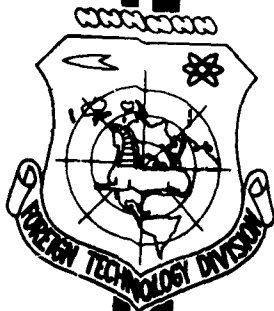
TRANSLATION

PEOPLE OF RARE PROFESSIONS....PILOTS
(NAVIGATORS) OF COSMONAUTS

By

V. Belikov

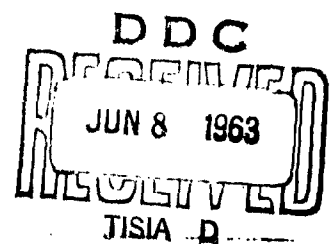
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OF COSMONAUTS

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English Pages: 5

SOURCE: Russian Newspaper, Izvestiya, Nr. 59,
10 March 63, p 6

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People of Rare Professions....Pilots (navigators) of Cosmonauts

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How then shall we call them, these young babies with excellent health and identically concluding auto-biographies: "registered at the school of cosmic implements and equipment testing..."? Testers? But the tester, at the time of our visit, had no implements and wore no equipment, except of a rubber bathing cap and swimming gear. What can be said, a poor arsenal for a cosmic frogman, participating in the difficult and complex experiment!

They go hand in hand, these two professions - cosmonaut and tester - they tell me. If the first one - captain of the starry ocean, whose ship is travelling over an unknown (uncharted) route, the second one is the pilot (navigator) who comes to aid in proper moments. The only sign for the navigator is the waterway, but he knows it like no one else.

But where do they study this cosmic waterway? not already in orbit! Of course not there, at the lab, here on the ground.

The experiment began on a frosty evening, when the tester came out from the ambulance at the well known porch of the laboratory. Along the way he joked:

I am perfectly healthy, it could not be any better but to work I go in an ambulance...

But this has been decided by doctors who met the tester at the lab door, a lab fully equipped with knowledge, multiplied by the "sensitivity" and "penetrability" of highly complex instruments. How many times he was entangled here in this room with wires-lines, suspended from the ceiling, running from all angles! the entire room was filled with devices - only the clicking of switches could be heard, and in the eyes rippled from signal lights and face plates. But the doctors seriously believe

that they now know about his organism, brain and feelings which are greater and better than the tester himself. Most like, that is just so. To no avail is the fact that the pens of instruments-self recorders have from time to time brought out a cunning relationship of electronic "letters" and the portfolios of the experimenters have swollen up with tables and charts of medicinal diagnoses.

The initial state of your heart is well known to us, said to him the leader of the experiment on this particular evening.- And when everything is done, we will compare data, consider them well, and something of cosmic flights of tomorrow will become perceptible to us...But right now you undress, get into the lab, we shall begin!

The tester went behind the door to which was already tacked on a graph for the daily shift of personnel. Someone of the lab workers hung out a sign reading: "Experiment in progress do not enter !"

Before I was allowed to enter the lab, the doctors (repeatedly) stated: you cannot remain here for a long time. The interview with the tester will be a very brief one, otherwise you will bungle our entire plan. And try to be as quiet as possible, noise is harmful to him...

In the uniform light of luminescent bulbs one could see something suspended, reminding from a distance the bridge of a ship: narrow ladders leading to it, hand rails and two larger round illuminators (windows), beyond which a dark-greenish liquid, penetrated by rays of hidden projectors.

This is the basin, and in it floats, more correctly, the tester lies motionlessly up to his neck in water.

What for is the screen under him? I inquired in a whisper, after taking a look into the illuminator (window)

Only as a safety measure, it does not hold him up. The temperature of the liquid there is plus 34 degrees, exactly such a degree where the trainee feels no warmth or cold. Right now he does not even feel his own body. The liquid balances gravity, almost total weightlessness exists.

It was found, that he has no body, no face, generally nothing. He as if ceased to exist. This feeling cannot be called as pleasant. It was rather depressing. He has literally dissolved in the water, which he also did not feel. And even the heart ceased hearing...

No, these words have not been uttered by the doctor, standing in line with me. It was the Polish writer Stanislaw Lem describing in one of his fantasies,, he was describing the state of a human being, submerged in exactly such a basin. The hero of the story withstood only seven hours, and for how long is the trainee already floating?

Can I climb upwards, I inquired? O K, but do not touch him, you will disturb the conditions of the experiment.

A dark browed twenty year old youngster met my glance with a surprised smile. No wonder that comrades in the training school sent best regards to him and expressed themselves highly about him.

How are they doing over there, he literally shoots the questions. Patently I tell him of all the news that happened there.

And how do you feel? The question came by itself.

At the beginning, before the organism became adapted to all this, I could not sleep, but now everything is in order.

Along the edge of the basin is a bench on the back of which a wrist watch is hung. This bench is usually occupied by duty personnel who feed him literally by spoon, read aloud newspapers and books to him and at night time they protect his sleep. Does he become bored? certainly, especially for trees, fresh wind and sun. And that is why he asked for reading of Turgenev's book and closed his eyes and quietly listened to the "Notes of a Hunter".

When do you think the experiment will be over? The initial phase has already expired and the doctors suggested that I get out...but I know all their tricks, they would like to extend the test to as long as possible. Their observations will then

become more valuable. Thus means that I will stay here and stay here. So I promised them you can fully count on my cooperation, I have enough strength to withstand this for a long time.

Are you thinking of the future? What will you become after completing the training a tester?

I do think lots about it, especially right now. But most likely I will sign up at a university for physics...

Aren't you dreaming about the cosmos?"

That is why I wish to learn physics, to become a cosmonaut.

The doctor is motioning to me that it is time to cut it out.

Good bay Lenya; Too bad I cannot squeeze your hand, but promise after the training to visit with us at the Izvestiya.

With pleasure, he answers and for a slight second he raises his hand. The skin on the fingers was swollen and turned white.

At the door the doctor says quietly to me:

He has already established a world record. No one has withstood the test for such a long period.

I throw a backward glance in the nasin lies motionlessly the tester. Tens of days of sleepless vigilance are passing for one the pilots (navigators) of the cosmonauts.

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